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A CHRISTIAN BASIS

FOR RECONSTRUCTION

A Statement signed by fourteen British Church leaders, including the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland.

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THE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE BASES
OF A JUST AND DURABLE PEACE
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Explanatory Statement

In March 1943 the Commission to Study the Bases of a Just and Durable Peace issued a Statement of Political Propositions ("Six Pillars of Peace"). This involved the application, as we saw it, of certain basic moral principles we had accepted. The British Council of Churches promptly decided to make the Statement a basis for their own study and critical examination was undertaken by a group of eminent British Christians who had long been giving much thought to post-war problems.

The conclusions of the British group were issued on July 29, 1943 in a Statement entitled "A Christian Basis for Reconstruction" over the signatures of fourteen foremost leaders of the British churches.

That Statement, which is here reproduced, is one of great significance. Its spirit will uplift, and its content will inform, the Christian people of America.

Of equal importance is the fact that the British and American Statements, taken together, strikingly manifest the power of Christianity to unite national groups in practical programs of common purpose. Each of the two Statements was prepared by loyal citizens, in one case British, in the other case American. But they were Christian citizens and they believed that the welfare of their own nation would best be served by righteous policies. The result is substantial agreement upon the fundamentals of a post-war order.

Christ long ago warned us that when the blind follow the blind they will end up together in the pit. That is the plight of the world today. Humanity is paying a ghastly penalty for blindly following blind leaders. Christian statesmanship can give, and increasingly is giving, enlightened leadership. Of that we have here a fresh demonstration and in that lies the hope of the world.

JOHN FOSTER DULLES, Chairman
Commission to Study the Bases
of a Just and Durable Peace

August, 1943

A CHRISTIAN BASIS FOR RECONSTRUCTION

We welcome unreservedly the statement* issued by the Commission to Study the Bases of a Just and Durable Peace, instituted by the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. We believe that the main principles stated are such as to commend themselves to Christian minds in this country, and we share the hope expressed by the Commission that combined action upon the basis of these principles may be taken by the United Nations.

We agree in joyful recognition of the truth that God is the Creator of the world and the Father of all men, that He created men and nations for fellowship in His family, that His purpose is the supreme reality in human history, and that policies which depart from that purpose must eventually lead to failure and disaster.

We must recognize that men do not put first among the objects of their ambition God's purpose of universal fellowship; they put in the first place what they suppose to be their own several interests, as individuals, as families, as classes in society, as nations, as races. From this self-seeking they can only be won by conversion to trust in the redeeming love of God. We agree with the American Commission that "the first and paramount task of the Christian churches remains that of bringing more persons to subject their lives to the will of God as revealed in Jesus Christ."

Statesmen and governments have to act through and on behalf of men and women as they now are. Christians, while working primarily for the conversion of men's hearts, must recognize that there is need to hold the selfish desires of men in check, and need also to subordinate force to law, while also seeking to secure that the law is just. For force, which when organized for the

* Statement of Political Propositions ("Six Pillars of Peace") issued March, 1943.

purposes of a nation is commonly called power, is a reality which exists and will continue to exist. Those who control it are under a perpetual temptation to use it for selfish ends. The lawless use of power for selfish ends will wreck all hopes of justice, fellowship and peace.

All war is a manifestation of the sin of the world, and the first duty of the Christian is to understand it in the light of the divine purpose and judgment. This is conspicuously true of the present war, which is more than a conflict of nations; it is a conflict of faiths. Consequently real victory in the war depends upon the clarity of our aims beyond the military defeat of the enemy, and the completeness and sincerity of our dedication to those aims.

I

We agree that "the peace must provide the political framework for a continuing collaboration of the United Nations and in due course of neutral and enemy nations." We accept this as a goal, and believe that without delay institutional forms should be created of a kind that will not limit or frustrate the fullest development of political cooperation on a world-wide scale.

We hold also that the achievement of such a world political organization will only be possible if the steps taken to accomplish it correspond to the most urgent necessities, so that it is the expression of a unity of action wrought out in facing the complex problems of world reconstruction. When the war ends in the victory of the United Nations (and that it should so end we hold to be necessary for the preservation, and still more, for the improvement, of our civilization) we shall be confronted with certain immediate and urgent needs, supreme among which will be the feeding of hungry people and the restoration of order. In the process of meeting the clamant needs we shall employ methods of cooperation likely to be of great value in developing the habit of cooperation in the new era.

Moreover, we attach great importance to a vigorous dealing with the question of security, assuring to all peoples freedom from fear. Unless the nations are set free from the fear of repeated wars, other goals will remain unattainable. It is not part of our task as Christians to say how this hope should be realized, but it is our task to insist on its primary importance. Practical cooperation in the establishment of order in the period after the cessation of hostilities will point the way to further developments. In this cooperation the lead plainly must be taken by the four principal powers of the United Nations — the United States of America, the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, the Republic of China and the British Commonwealth of Nations. Not less plainly the responsible share to be taken by the smaller of the United Nations must be recognized. For any of the United Nations to fail in supplying its share of contribution to the armed force required — a share proportionate to its population, wealth and strategic situation — would be shirking a manifest duty. This acceptance of a burden of responsibility by the United Nations should be preparatory to the inclusion not only of the neutral but also of the vanquished nations in the corporate system of world order so soon as political and psychological considerations permit.

It will not be possible to deal with the many and vast problems affecting the whole world through a single international organization for world government; it may be best, as has been already suggested in several quarters, to have both functional and regional departments beneath a supreme World Council. International reconstruction demands probably not one council but several devoted to different aspects; there must be effective agencies of international justice and equity. It is in the actual cooperation of the United Nations in the service of all nations according to their need that we may best hope to find the way of continuing an order for the world which at once respects the rights of all peoples, including the small nations and the minorities within the nations, and also recognizes the leadership inevitably devolving upon the great nations and especially upon China, Great Britain, Russia and the United States.

II

We agree that "the peace must make provision for bringing within the scope of international agreement those economic and financial acts of national governments which have widespread international repercussions." Indeed, we would go much further. Private as well as governmental action can have large international effects. We consider that, apart from the desperate state of need in many parts of the world during the first years after the war, a permanent aim of the nations of the world and of their governments should be to develop and to mobilize the resources of the earth with a view to achieving for all peoples freedom from want.

In the case of industrial nations, and especially of Great Britain and the United States, this must include the avoidance of widespread unemployment. Unemployment has been, in part at least, a price which we have paid for forgetting that the primary purpose of production should be the satisfaction of the needs of ordinary people, or in other words, the establishment of freedom from want. It is by restoring this sense of purpose to the productive machine and by awaking the people of the richer countries to a sense of responsibility for achieving this aim, not only in their own country but throughout the world, that Britain and America will find the best hope of eliminating unemployment within their own territories. Such a task corresponds to the Christian belief that all men and all nations are members of the family of God, Who created the world and its resources for the benefit of all. To undertake it would inevitably promote fellowship and goodwill. The world has always been one fellowship spiritually, with one weal and one woe; it has now also become quite plainly an economic unit in which we can prosper together or suffer together, but cannot in the long run prosper at one another's expense. The successful pursuit of this aim involves to pre-conditions. One is the establishment of international agencies of economic reconstruction, to which, as to the common organs of social and economic security, the vanquished nations must, as soon as conditions make it possible, be admitted as equal partners; the other is a readiness in the victorious nations

to forego economic advantages which it will be possible and very tempting to secure for themselves at the expense of others.

Something more than the "enlightened selfishness" familiar in international politics will be needed at this point. Nothing but dedication to a great ideal, with the readiness for sacrifice which true dedication involves, will be enough. It is at least doubtful whether that dedication can endure without religious inspiration.

III

We agree upon the need "to adapt the treaty structure of the world to changing underlying conditions." As the American Commission further remarks, "change effected under the threat of force seldom is productive of peace, because change under such circumstances seems to reward and thus encourages violent and lawless elements. On the other hand nations, like individuals, seldom freely abandon their acquired legal rights." We doubt the feasibility of establishing a special mechanism for the revision of treaties. In major issues it is essential that the decision should be arrived at by the supreme world agency, whatever that may be. We hope that a continuing cooperation in economic tasks and in the maintenance of world order may create a readiness to negotiate together such as would enable the world structure to be responsive to the need for change.

IV

We agree that not only good government but self-government should be the goal for all men, and that the progress of backward or subject peoples towards complete responsibility is a proper subject of international concern. There are in fact many degrees between complete self-government and complete subjection, as the British Empire itself illusrates. Progress towards political autonomy must be united with progress towards an improved standard of living, education and social services, and it is probable that this can best be achieved by the maintenance, or establishment, of larger units of organization. Technical skill,

knowledge and dedicated service should be made available as widely as possible; the economic and social needs of the backward territories demand aid on a scale only to be met by world effort. Accordingly we welcome the idea of an international colonial commission, which would have the right to inform itself upon the condition of subject territories, to report to whatever world political organization is created upon breaches of international undertakings, to supervise the application of pooled international resources in carrying forward economic and social development, and to watch over the development of self-government. Some such form of international supervision over not-fully-self-governing territories can be combined, as the League of Nations mandates system has shown, with that direct administration of each of these territories by some single Power, which experience has shown to be the most practical working arrangement, though, under modern conditions, it has become improbable that even the strongest single Power will continue to be able to defend and develop dependencies single-handed.

V

We have already stated our conviction that there must be an adequate international control of armed power, and our hope that the present association of the United Nations may develop into a world political organization in which would be vested armed power sufficient to prevent renewed aggression and the preparation of future wars. We think it essential to approach this question by way of a search for the means of a responsible, combined maintenance of peace, rather than by way of an effort to limit armament. As the American Commission remarks: "the positive purpose of control is to bring such military establishments as remain into the affirmative service of international order."

In this connection we think it right to include some definite statement regarding the treatment of the vanquished enemies. They must be disarmed and deprived of the means of aggression; but at the same time we must take care that there is open to their citizens the same opportunity as other people enjoy of an equal

share in all that conduces to the good life, so soon as and so long as their states behave as good neighbours among the other states. The settlement following on their defeat must be militarily and politically severe, including the punishment of those proved guilty of crimes committed in the war; but it must be such that coming generations, in those countries, looking back with fuller knowledge on the events of these years, can accept it as just. This involves a discrimination between those who direct the totalitarian regime in particular enemy countries, and those who are either its victims or its adversaries. We attach great importance to promoting by every possible means an increase in the influence, in these countries, of the elements in them which are most in sympathy with the ideals of world order set forth here, and in this connection we look forward to an increase in the collaboration of the churches across the divisions between the nations now on opposite sides of the conflict.

VI

With the emphasis laid by the American Commission upon securing to individuals everywhere the right to religious and intellectual liberty we wholly agree. We consider that not only the rights of conscience of individuals but the proper freedom of churches as worshipping and witnessing bodies ought to be respected and preserved, and this should of course apply to the adherents of all religions. We attach great importance also to academic freedom both for the individual and for such organizations as universities. The problem of the refugee is likely to occupy much of the energy of the United Nations as of other friendly peoples, and although it includes many issues beyond that of safeguarding the differences of different groups in matters of religion and conscience, we think that no world settlement which does not give reasonable security and freedom to the religious, cultural and other minorities, and especially to the most ancient of all, the Jewish people, can be said to have succeeded.

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Governing all else is the mood or temper in which we approach the peace. We shall be very weary, and fatigue is a selfish

mood. There will be great temptation to relax, to shirk responsibility, and to gather for our own advantage the fruits of victory. If we do that, the interval between this war and the next may be less than the twenty years of restless truce that ended in 1939. We need still the spirit of dedication and of sacrifice for the general good, which now means no less than the good of all the peoples upon the earth. For the tasks, though immense, are those which arise out of the historical situation in which we stand, and this situation, to those who believe in the Living God, is with all its vast responsibilities and difficulties still within the providence and purpose of God. It is He Who has given to us at this time the opportunity to serve in a manner new in history the interests of all mankind.

This spirit of service for the common good must be embodied in institutions designed to maintain and express it. Thus every nation which has the care of colonial dependencies should give an account of its stewardship to an international authority. Every nation should conform its commercial and industrial policy to principles laid down by an international council of economic reconstruction. And every nation should supply its quota of armed force to the world or regional council of security, so that the very armaments of the nations should be changed from being the instruments of selfish interest and mutual injury to become the common instrument of all peoples in the cooperative enterprise of civilization.

Institutions alone can effect little. The common institutions must serve common purposes and policies — in particular the establishment of freedom from fear and freedom from want. But these purposes can exist at all only so far as the people of the nations entertain them. To create a fellowship of all peoples in acceptance and pursuit of those purposes is a primary responsibility of Christians in all lands.

For in the end what is needed above all else is the recognition of clear moral standards which the nations and the citizens of the nations accept — in other words, the Law and Purpose of God. We need a change of heart; but we need also a standard

for our conduct, a law to obey. We call men to recognize the Law of God as that by which they seek to guide their conduct, in national as in personal affairs, and as that by which they agree that their conduct should be judged.

WILLIAM CANTUAR:
CYRIL EBOR:
JOHN BAILLIE
ROY D. WHITEHORN
M. E. AUBREY
S. M. BERRY
GEORGE CICESTER:
J. HUTCHISON COCKBURN
A. D. LINDSAY
RICHARD LIVINGSTONE
WALTER J. NOBLE
WILLIAM PATON
JOHN HOPE SIMPSON
R. H. TAWNEY

Note

The above signatories, with their official positions, are here listed for the reader's information:

William Cantuar, Archbishop of Canterbury; Cyril Ebor, Archbishop of York; John Baillie, Moderator of the Church of Scotland; Roy D. Whitehorn, Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council of England; M. E. Aubrey, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland; S. M. Berry, General Secretary of the Congregational Union of England and Wales; George Cicester, Bishop of Chichester; J. Hutchison Cockburn, former Moderator of the Church of Scotland; A. D. Lindsay, Master, Balliol College; Richard Livingstone, Master, Corpus Christi College; Walter J. Noble, President of the Methodist Conference; William Paton, a General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (Provisional Committee); John Hope Simpson, Authority on Colonial Affairs and R. H. Tawney, Economist.